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ABSTRACT

One of the major problems with the English curriculum is that literature, language, and composition, the three major strands of the curriculum, have been separated rather than integrated within the curriculum. This inservice program, which was given for English teachers at Niles High School in Skokie, Illinois, advocates the use of conceptual or thematic units which bring together sequences of literary works with common properties and problems for teaching literature. The program contends that various common problems with traditional instruction can be mitigated by taking a thematic approach to teaching literature. It defines and outlines a thematic approach to instruction and examines some benefits to designing curriculum as thematic or conceptual units. It also lists the features of good thematic units and the components of a thematic unit. In fact, the program delineates fully the use of thematic units, including the use of a sequence of activities and materials needed and the process to be followed in developing thematic units. A model unit on Coming of Age in the Vietnam War Combat Literature is appended, as are sample unit activities. (Contains a 43 references.) (NKA)

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Redefining Thematic Teaching

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Conceptual or thematic units "bring together sequences of literary works with common properties and problems, arranged so that students become increasingly familiar with and adept at dealing with those properties and problems" (Smagorinsky & Gevinson, 1989, p.63)

for

In-service program for English teachers at Niles North High School, 9800 South Lawlor Avenue, Skokie, Illinois 60077

Friday, November 10, 2000

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CS 217 329

Redefining Thematic Teaching

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By Larry R. Johannessen

I. Why teach thematically?

One of the major problems with the English curriculum is that Literature, language, and composition, **the three major strands of the English curriculum, have been separated rather than integrated** within the curriculum. Classroom instruction is often planned around discrete units of each: a literature unit, followed by a language unit, followed by a composition unit, and so forth. Indeed, the elective program movement may have compounded the problem as well. A glance at typical offerings in various elective programs suggests the separation of composition, language, and literature: Composition I, Elements of Writing, Grammar and Linguistics, Literature of the Midwest, and Major British Writers. Commenting on this separation,

Anthony R. Petrosky explains,

> As a result of separate instruction and assessment of progress in reading, literature, and composition, curricula in language are fragmented to the point where literature is often kept out of reading, and composition instruction seldom includes reading or study of literary works, excepts as models of writing (1982, 19).

Indeed, what makes Petrosky's comment ring true for me is when I hear English teachers tell me that they don't teach reading, they teach literature, or when they are asked how they teach their students to write about literature, they tell me that they are not writing teachers, I know that these teachers are missing something very important.

While **textbooks** are doing a somewhat better job these days of integrating instruction, they still are **not very good** at integrating instruction in reading, writing, language, literature, and critical thinking.

Assessment and testing and other kinds of accountability measures are also having a **negative impact on the English curriculum** and causing further

fragmentation. We now in many local and state assessment programs assess reading/literature in one test and writing and language skills in another test, thus, almost ensuring that the curriculum will reflect this separation.

Another problem I see is that one of the standard instructional approaches to teaching literature, one of which is "**the elements of literature" approach**, suggested by many textbooks fails to help students really understand literature beyond a **superficial** level. For example, consider the problem of trying to get ninth grade students to understand Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. According to these textbooks the idea seems to be to have students memorize terms such as "aside," "pun," "meter," "iambic pentameter," "allusion," "irony," and "tragedy." The implication is that students need to know these terms in order to understand and appreciate the play. To help students learn the terms, there are handy definitions provided in the "Handbook of Literary Terms" in the backs of these textbooks, lots of study guide questions and quizzes, and, of course, an objective test at the end to ensure students have memorized the definitions. Presumably at the end of this sequence of instruction, which the textbook authors constantly refer to as a "unit" and which they title, *"The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* Unit," students will have mastered the play. It appears that they use two criteria to define a unit: It begins with the words "Romeo and Juliet" and ends with the words "Romeo and Juliet."

Very interesting! And, after looking at what many textbook anthologies had to say about how to teach a unit on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, it is not difficult to understand why, after struggling through the play, many students have learned only two things: they do not understand the play and they hate Shakespeare.

What is wrong with this approach? Louise Rosenblatt (1968) argues that this approach often puts the students' focus on a great deal that is **"irrelevant and distracting."** In fact, in an analysis of this approach as used in most secondary literature textbook anthologies, Michael Smith (1991) describes it as **"very reductive"** and argues that it does little to prepare students to cope with the complexities involved in understanding

literary texts. Another problem with this approach is that it is very boring for most students. It is pretty difficult to get students involved in and excited about a lesson on say "foreshadowing" or "foils." Robert Probst (1994) argues that this approach ignores the fact that while "the literary experience" may involve these and other elements, it is first and foremost an "immediate encounter between a reader and book," and this he maintains, is where texts and lessons should begin" (Probst 1994, 37).

Some **textbook anthologies claim** that they have solved the problem by setting things up **thematically,** but when you really look at them they often lack any kind coherence. For example, one textbook defines "theme" in this manner: "Theme differs from the subject of a literary work in that it involves a statement or opinion about that subject" (1982, 599). All I can say is, "Huh?" Another literature textbook anthology presents a thematic unit in which all of the works involve the "theme of reflections" (Rashkis and Bennett 1981). If a student were asked the theme of "Flowers for Algernon" (one of the selections in this thematic unit), would "reflection" be a satisfactory response? Would that response indicate a student's ability to analyze theme? Does identifying "reflections" as a "theme" require the same skills as explaining the author's opinion about "reflection"? Are the same skills involved in determining the theme of a fable when a moral is explicitly stated at the end as in determining the theme of a work when it is implied and never directly stated? Do the exhaustive lists of terms in textbooks (one 9th grade text presents 87, and another presents 115) represent the basic skills involved in interpreting literature? I think that you can see that there is a kind of artificiality here that students pick up on almost immediately.

Another standard approach to teaching literature in secondary school and college is the **chronological approach**. This approach may also have some **problems.** First, consider American Literature--we usually begin with the Puritans, and ask our students to study Puritanism and some of those delightful sermons and poems by Ann Bradstreet and then read a novel like Nathanial Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Once you have tried to

teach this novel at the start of the year in the context of Puritanism and chronologically a time or two, you realize that there are some problems. The biggest problem is that some of most difficult literature comes first in the curriculum and some of the more accessible literature like Sandra Sisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1989) or J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* comes at the end. This is backwards. We shouldn't be trying to force students to get through the hardest literature first. We should be starting with more accessible literature and building to the more difficult literature.

British Literature is even worse because of course we begin with texts in Old English, move through Middle English, early modern English, and finally end with something the kids actually recognize as being part of the English language. Or, as the old joke in college went, "What are you taking this semester?" Answer: "Oh, I'm studying Beowulf to Virgina Wolf." "Oh, you mean British Literature." So, for many of our students, this isn't a very effective approach, and in the final analysis, we often end up settling for having students memorize a few authors' names, dates, and titles, and the definition of Puritanism.

Another way that the **curriculum is fragmented is through many of the textbook anthologies** that we use. In many of these textbook anthologies **writing isn't really taught to students**. Students are often told to write about some structural element, such as symbolism, or what the textbook authors call a theme, but all that is usually provided is a model and step-by-step directions for going through the writing process: One textbook presented these guidelines for writing a literary analysis of "Flowers for Algernon": Brainstorm about ideas; make a list of your ideas; narrow your ideas down to one good subject; write three topic sentences for your subject; find examples in the text to support each of your topic sentences; write a draft of your paper; revise your paper; edit your paper; publish your paper. In short, in the curriculum I am describing, students are often assigned writing, told to write about literature, but they are not taught how to do it.

So what we have is **discontinuity.** We have pieces of the English curriculum here and there, but nothing seems to connect in any real coherent way.

Another problem with the standard approaches to teaching literature is that in an attempt to **simplify knowledge,** they often reduce it down to **isolated bits of information;** and because of this they emphasize multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer formats, which reinforces traditional patterns of instruction with an emphasis on lecture, recitation, and short-answer discussion, which many researchers point out may preclude students from engaging in the kind of extended inquiry necessary if students are to interpret, analyze, and write about the literature we ask them to read.

Another big problem is that many **students are not motivated** for a variety of reasons, and with more and more heterogeneous classes, the standard approaches do not seem to allow teachers to meet the needs of all of their students. How can a teacher differentiate instruction when the focus of instruction is on literary terms like "mood" or "paradox"?

In contrast to the standard approaches, Louise Rosenblatt talks about the need to foster what she calls **"fruitful...transactions between individual readers and individual literary works"** (1968, 26-27). The question is, how do we accomplish this. One was to help students have "fruitful" involvements with literature is to focus instruction on a theme or concept that will be of interest to students and is critical to comprehension of a text or texts. According to Smagorinsky (1989) and Smagorinsky, McCann, and Kern (1987) ensuring that students experience literature involves creating instruction that **taps into their prior experience** and **engages them in interpretative problems** related to the theme or concept that is the focus of instruction.

How Can we address these problems with traditional instruction? Taking a thematic approach to teaching literature.

I have found that setting up instruction so that it focuses on key themes or concepts can help address some the problems I have described. Thematic teaching provides **coherence** for you and for your students. By focusing on themes that are of interest to students, the materials are appealing and engaging to them. Most important, I have found that thematic units focus on meaningful knowledge. Thematic teaching can provide a solid intellectual basis for your units, so that you are focusing on knowledge that you and your students know is important and will be useful to them. For example, when I began working on teaching Vietnam War literature, I had to do a lot of reading and thinking about why it is important to study that literature and what is involved in teaching Vietnam War Literature because frankly almost no one was teaching it, and I needed to find some strong reasons for studying it. My search took me to literary theory and criticism, psychology of war and fighting in war (PTSD), war literature from previous wars, American history, political science, biology (Agent Orange), and theories of teaching and learning. In short, I read widely, and I put together Vietnam War literature units and courses that are fairly widely regarded as one of main sources on teaching Vietnam War Literature.

My reading and research forced me to ask some very basic but important questions that guided the units and courses I put together. Some of the key or guiding thematic questions in my basic unit are: What led teenagers to go fight in this war? What was it like for those who fought in the war? What was the impact of the war on those who went and those who didn't? What are these authors saying about the Vietnam War or war in general? By asking kids more authentic questions about literature--questions like what is Tim O'Brien trying to tell us about war in his novel, *The Things They Carried?* instead of what "figurative language" does he use in the chapter, "How to Tell A True War Story"?--**the questions become more real to kids and therefore, the questions and the literature become more motivating.**

Also, as I will show you a bit later, thematic teaching allows you to integrate instruction in reading--comprehension of literature--and interpretation of literature.

In addition, as I will illustrate later, thematic teaching provides a context that enables you to integrate teaching reading and writing skills that make instruction more meaningful to students.

Thematic teaching also provide a basis for more **meaningful long-term sequencing.** Instead of units that are loosely put together around a topic like "reflections" or "the short story," or "Realism," you have some important theme or concept that provides a compelling reason for sequencing--because you begin with easier literature and as students build knowledge and skill with interpreting and analyzing, then you add more complex literature for students to read and interpret dealing with the same theme.

Thematic teaching overcomes a number of the problems with traditional approaches. Themes are much easier to sequence in a logical fashion than they are when you are trying to use the chronological approach. You don't have many choices when you are locked into chronology.

It is also much easier to **meet the needs of heterogeneous classes** with a thematic approach than it is through a chronological approach. How do you differentiate instruction when you are locked into the Anglo-Saxon Period, unless you have your best students read *Beowulf* in verse form, average readers read a narrative version, and your weak students read a comic-strip version of the epic.

With the thematic unit approach you **can start with something that kids know.** You might begin with a television show or rock music lyrics or a young adult literature story or a short and accessible poem or two that might capture students' interests.

With the thematic unit approach you can start with what students already know and challenge them and **take them into unknown territory.** You have a set of key questions that you want students to grapple with each text, the questions are recursive, and you ask them over and over again; in one sense this kind of teaching approximates Jerome Brunner's spiral curriculum theory. As students wrestle with the theme with each

succeeding and more complex text, the kids become more sophisticated at dealing with the theme in the texts they are reading.

Thematic teaching helps kids think more critically and become better readers and writers, and they are better able to delve into the affective aspects of the theme.

Most important in a thematic approach to instruction, students focus their inquiry on broad questions that will connect and integrate the content, activities, and skills that are important to the curriculum. Here are examples of some themes from various subjects:

A THEMATIC APPROACH TO INSTRUCTION

WORLD GEOGRAPHY:	Community: What is a community
BIOLOGY:	Interdependence: How are living things connected to each other?
ENGLISH:	Heroes: What is a hero?
	Maturity: How do people mature?
WORLD HISTORY:	Utopia: What is the ideal society?

Let's examine some benefits to designing curriculum as thematic or conceptual units:

There are at least four major reasons for taking a thematic approach:

Coherence: When a theme provides a focus for inquiry throughout a unit, a semester, or a year, students have some hope of recognizing the connectedness of the various activities and endeavors. In the best situation, a sequence of lessons builds toward deep understanding of a theme or some other cumulative effect.

Integration: The focus on a broad theme allows integration of the many components of a subject or the integration of several disciplines. Students can draw from different disciplines, yet connect the variety of materials and activities

(through the theme). Instruction focuses on the investigation of the theme, not on the coverage of a specified amount of material.

Context: Students pursue goals and objectives within a larger context of investigating the theme. The context provides some immediate reason for developing skills and learning particular content. The goals and objectives are not abandoned, but are pursued within a specific context (of developing knowledge about the theme).

Flexibility: The theme provides the broad framework (the big ideas) within which a teacher can operate in a variety of ways. As a teacher, I am guided by the question of whether or not we have adequately investigated the theme (as well as other factors), not by the question of whether or not we have covered certain material or have met objective 1.9a.

What is a Theme? What is a thematic unit?

I have sort of defined a theme for you by pointing to what it isn't--and it isn't the definition I gave you from a standard textbook anthology. No, what I mean by thematic unit is what I have on the title page):

Thematic, or conceptual, **units** "bring together sequences of literary works with common properties and problems, arranged so that students become increasingly familiar with and adept at dealing with those properties and problems" (Smagorinsky & Gevinson, 1989, p. 63).

A colleague of mine, Elizabeth Kenney, who teaches at Stevenson High School, defines Thematic Units in the following manner:

> **A thematic unit** is a tightly sequenced investigation of a concept, beginning in the students' intellectual home territory, and taking them into the unknown, unified by the recursive application of key questions.

In other words, a theme, or concept, that might be explored or examined in a unit is something like *maturity, the outcast, friendship,* or *romantic love*. She explains that the questions are recursive in that you ask the same questions over and over again with each text students read and/or problem they tackle; the result is a spiraling of the students' knowledge and understanding of the concept as they become more and more adept at dealing with the concept as they tackle increasingly more difficult problems and literature.

Smith and Hillocks (1988) identify three major types of conceptual units:

- theme (maturity or the outcast),
- genre (satire or the epic), or
- strategy (irony or symbol).

These type of units are different from topics (which is what most textbooks really have) in that they (and here comes another definition of thematic or conceptual units) explore complex issues with several meanings. Instead of encountering lots of stories dealing with growing up, students experience a variety of works to develop a rich definition of what it means to be mature.

Why Design Thematic or Conceptual Units?

Coming back to this question at this point leads us to another important source that strongly supports the teaching thematically?

Applebee (1997) identified four essential principles on which an effective curriculum should be developed:

- An effective curriculum must be built around language episodes of high quality.
- An effective curriculum requires an appropriate breadth of materials to sustain conversation.
- The parts of an effective curriculum are interrelated.
- For a curriculum to be effective, instruction must be geared to helping students enter into the curricular conversation.

Thematic units provide students with the scaffolding and coherence to allow them to enter the great conversation at a sophisticated level.

What Are the Features of Good Thematic Units?

A good thematic unit contains the following key features:

An Effective Theme that is relevant, engaging, intellectually rich, appropriate to the curriculum, and is a manageable scope;

A strong rationale providing the intellectual basis for the unit and explaining why the unit is worth studying;

Key questions governing the parameters of the exploration;

An Introductory activity that "hooks" the students, "problematizes" the theme or concept and raises key questions;

A Sequence of Activities and Materials providing continuous growth in sophistication and recursive unity;

A Gateway Activity providing a link to prior units and/or prior learning that involves working with relevant processes and interacting with peers;

and Assessment and Evaluation involving application of consolidated ideas and both students and teacher evaluate the effectiveness of the unit.

Components of a Thematic Unit?

Brief Version of an Effective Theme:

There are five characteristics of an effective theme:

1. It is relevant:
    - relevant to literature (and to the study of literature)
    - relevant to students' lives;
2. It is engaging or interesting to students;
3. It contains intellectual richness;
4. It is appropriate to the curriculum;
5. and it is manageable in scope.

Components of a Thematic Unit?

Effective Theme:

There are five characteristics of an effective theme: First, It is **relevant:** and there are two dimensions to relevance. Is it **relevant to literature** (and to the study of literature); and is it **relevant to students' lives?** Is it relevant to literature? If you want to study Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms,* a key theme you might want to focus on is courageous action. Why? It is important to understanding this particular novel, important throughout the history of Western literature, going all the way back to philosophers like Aristotle and Homer's epic poems.

Also, it is an issue in many students' lives. Many of our students have this notion that courage is never backing down, never letting anyone offend you for any reason and seeking revenge if they do. Studying courage in a work like *A Farewell to Arms* might help them understand that courage is much more than being a tough guy, that it involves a

number of key issues, such as acting for a noble cause, being aware of the consequences, taking a personal risk, etc. As the novel comes to a climax, the real question becomes who exhibits real courage in the novel, Frederic Henry or Catherine Barkley? And Why?

Second, the theme must be **engaging or interesting to students.** Courage is of interest to most students, especially because they are going through that stage of development where they are in the process of defining themselves, and this is one of those themes that is key to how they and others see them. They want to know the right thing to do. They want to act courageously as they perceive their heroes act.

My first year of teaching, I discovered that a theme that was engaging to students in one context may not be in another context. I student taught at Hales-Franciscan High School on the South Side of Chicago. All black and all boys. I designed a thematic unit that I called "The Literature of Black Protest" and the major work was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The unit was very effective. Then, I got a job at Lyons Township High School in La Grange, Illinois. And I tried to teach the same unit. After about a week and a half, I abandoned it. This group of white, suburban students, were not the least bit interested in the theme of the unit. The next year, I tried it again, with a slightly different theme and some different works and it was very successful. The new theme: "The Literature of Social Protest."

Third, **the theme must be intellectually rich.** A colleague of mine who taught in an interdisciplinary program at Stevenson High School in Linconshire, Illinois, likes to tell the story about trying to come up with themes when it involved a science teacher, math teacher, social studies teacher, and an English teacher. One theme that they abandoned after working on it for awhile was transportation. It sounded good at the start, but the more they talked about it, they more they ran into trouble coming up with appropriate things especially for math. It just lacked intellectual richness. Another weak theme that one of my preservice students came up with one year was Decision-making. At first, I thought it was pretty good, but the more she worked on it and we talked about it, the

weaker it became. Just about any work of literature would work, but it was difficult to set parameters or to make it viable for the study of literature.

Fourth, **a good theme is appropriate to the curriculum.** What are the appropriate works, appropriate themes in terms of the literature in the curriculum, in terms of what kids studied last year and will study next year. For example, you could do a unit on The Civil War with a work like *The Red Badge of Courage* for ninth grade students, but one problem with this is that they will study the war in American History in 10th or 11th grade, and therefore, it would seem to be more appropriate to pick a topic that would fit better with the ninth grade curriculum, perhaps something like coming-of-age, or courage.

Finally, **a good theme should be manageable in scope.** When I first started putting together units that focused on war literature, I started with the idea of War or War and Peace, but I discovered that these are much too broad for a unit. In fact, at the college level, I taught a course called modern war literature that started with the Civil War and ended with Vietnam. The basic theme of the course was modern war literature. That took me an entire semester. War or War and Peace is much too broad. You could come up with a good 4 to 6, 6 to 8, or 8 to 10 week unit with a focus like The Vietnam War, or Friendship, or Conflict with Authority, or Survival: Values Under Stress, or Intimate Relationships: Love.

One more bad theme: Change. First of all, what literature couldn't fit under this theme? How do you come up with viable parameters for this idea?

A Good Unit Has a Strong Rationale

Another important component of a good unit is that it has a **strong rationale.** In the past, teachers did need to create formally written rationales for their units. In reality, they created them, but they did not develop them into any sort of formal or even tangible document. However, in recent years having a good strong tangible rationale for your units and courses is almost a necessity. I require all of my secondary methods students to write

a rationale. More and more teachers tell me that the time spent on a rationale pays dividends in the long run. If you have articulated a thoughtful rationale, then later in the planning process, when you have to make difficult choices, you have the rationale to fall back on, and this can help you negotiate those decisions.

A good rationale also comes in handy when you have to justify what you are doing to students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and/or board members. If you have a well thought out rationale, it is much easier to defend what you are doing, and avoid or quickly solve problems with any of the above audiences. In this age of reform and public scrutiny of what teachers are doing, it is essential to have a well thought out rationale for your units.

Smagorinsky and Gevinson (1989) suggest the following questions when selecting a unit theme and developing a rationale:

- Why am I teaching this?
- What student needs will this unit meet? Are these needs academic, personal, or both?
- What will students learn from studying this material? Is this knowledge academic, personal, or both?
- Upon what do I base my answers to these questions? Intuition? Research? Personal Experience?

Here are key questions that a rationale should answer:

1. Why is the unit worth teaching?
2. Why is the idea in-and-of-itself an idea worth grappling with for kids of this age?
3. Why is this unit appropriate to this particular age?

The rationale should answer these questions. One way to begin writing a rationale is to imagine that someone is challenging what you want to do. How will you answer them?

Key Unit Questions

One thing that sets thematic units apart from other kinds of units is the kind of questions at the center of instruction. "Key Unit Questions" are a set of higher order questions students ought to be able to answer (or substantially grapple with) by the end of the unit. Our articulation of the key unit questions is what gives rise to specific objectives and activities, and provides a rationale for sequencing these activities. These questions also shape evaluation: true evaluation of the success of the unit is the students' ability to apply unit concepts to unfamiliar works. Don't keep these questions a secret from the students. In some cases, we may have students generate these questions themselves.

For example, Smagorinsky and Gevinson (1989) offer the following set of key questions for a thematic unit on Coming-of-Age:

1. What is the definition of *maturity* ? What examples of immature behavior do the protagonists exhibit before their coming-of-age experience? What examples of mature behavior do they exhibit after their coming-of-age experience?
2. What is the key incident that causes the protagonist to change? What particular characteristics does the incident have that affect the protagonist so profoundly?
3. What are the similarities among the experiences of the characters in the various stories? How truly do these experiences reflect those of real people?
4. In what ways does the reader have empathy for the protagonist? How does the empathy affect the reader's comprehension?

An Introductory Activity ("Hook") for The Unit

A good thematic unit also contains an introductory activity that "hooks" the students, "probematizes" the theme or concept, and raises key questions. A good introductory activity activities prior knowledge, and/or connects the theme or concept in some way to students' experience, and/or helps students make connections to the theme of the unit, and provides scaffolding that will help students begin to understand and make connections to the theme (or provide a cognitive map for understanding the theme).

Because the success of any unit often rests on the affective involvement of the students, it is crucial to begin a unit with an activity that generates interest and enthusiasm. In addition, research indicates that what we do at the start of a unit or course has a powerful and long-lasting impact on students. Therefore, it is worth devoting particular effort to developing an introductory activity that will engage or hook students' interest, as well as generate the key unit questions. The ideal introductory activity is not only engaging or fun, but--like the thematic unit as a whole--begins in the realm of the familiar, and then moves students into a more sophisticated way of thinking about the theme. Generally speaking theorists and researchers have identified six or seven different kinds of introductory activities: opinionnaires, surveys, case studies, scenarios, role-playing, simulations, and writing about and discussing a theme, issue, or concept.

Characteristics of a good introductory activity:

- Begins at the students' interest level;
- Is engaging or interesting (fun);
- Elicits what students already know about the topic;
- "Problematizes" the theme somewhat; makes students realize that it's more complicated than they realized;
- Raises key unit questions;
- Provides scaffolding or a cognitive map for understanding the theme.

If you will look your handout, you will see an example of an opinionnaire introductory activity (See Appendix A, "Romantic Love Opinionnaire"). This opinionnaire is a modified version of one that originally appeared in my book, *Writing About Literature* (1984) and was designed for a unit on romantic love that contains a fables, poetry, short stories, and longer works, including F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Notice how the statements key into students' ideas and views of romantic love, and when students discuss and debate the various statements in small group and whole class discussions they become engaged in discussing the nature of true love, whether teenagers can experiences true love, or if physical attraction must precede true love. The activity also draws out of students what they know about the topic as they search for examples from their own lives to support their views about romantic love. One of the key aspects of the activity is that students come to realize that romantic love is much more complicated than they imagined, and this realization helps to interest students in learning more about this theme. Also, this activity raised key questions that will occur in the literature that students will read and study in the unit. For example, some of the stories in the unit examine the question of is love at first site possible. This question is raised on the opinionnaire for students to discuss, and this is a key question that will be asked as students encounter literature that deals with this issue. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, this activity provides a cognitive map for students as they move through the literature in the unit. Students repeatedly make reference to items from the opinionnaire as they encounter this theme in the literature. It gives them a place to start, a way to think about the literature they are reading.

A Sequence of Activities and Materials

A good thematic unit also contains **a sequence of activities and materials** that provide continuous growth in sophistication and are recursive.

Critics of thematic units often see them as loose collections of at times tangential related activities and materials. Others claim that thematic units tend to get repetitive and boring for students. What sets apart a good thematic unit from this sort of loose collection is a careful sequence of activities and materials designed to begin in students' intellectual home territory, and then bringing them into an increasingly sophisticated consideration of the theme, through the recursive application of key unit questions.

In general, the lessons in a thematic unit are sequenced in the following manner:

- **Preliminary lessons** that build on the unit's theme or concept: These lessons are driven by the key questions, and use activities and materials that capitalize on students' experiences to develop the theme or concept;
- Lessons that start to **synthesize and test** the theme or concept;
- Lessons that **apply** the theme or concept: This usually involves some type of move to independence.

A good thematic unit is designed so that there is a sequence of lessons that builds in complexity, adding more difficult problems, activities, and materials as students move through the unit. In addition, there is more teacher direction and control at the beginning of the unit or a lesson when the teacher is introducing the key questions, materials, and theme; then the students work in small groups with less teacher control and direction as students begin to synthesize and test the key questions; and finally students work independently by the end of the unit where they apply the key questions on their own.

A little later we will do two activities to help you better understand how sequencing works.

A Gateway Activity

A good thematic unit contains a gateway activity that provides a link to prior units and/or prior learning that involves working with relevant processes (critical thinking and/or

comprehension and interpretation of literature) and interacting with peers that focuses on a specific but key task.

Hillocks, who coined the term, defines a gateway activity as the activity that engages students in using difficult production, interpretation, and/or critical thinking strategies with varying levels of support and lead eventually to independence (1995, 150). In shorter units, the gateway activity may be the introductory activity; however, in longer units, this activity takes place at a key juncture in the unit, often before or while students are grappling with the theme in a major work in a unit, and/or when the teacher wants students to move from developing the unit theme to synthesizing and testing the theme. The activity involves significant interaction with peers.

The characteristics of The Gateway Activity Are:

- It is designed for a specific and key task (such as helping students put together the pieces or a key piece of the unit theme or concept often in the major work of the unit;
- It is designed to engage students in working with relevant processes (critical thinking and comprehension and interpretation of literature; speaking and/or writing production strategies);
- It is an activity that requires significant peer interaction (discussion) often through some sort of journal writing, debate, role playing, simulation, opinionnaire, survey, case study analysis, scenarios, or some combination of these.

"What Makes a Good Romantic Love Relationship?" Scenarios

If you will look at the next activity in your handout (See Appendix A), you will see a set of scenarios that focus on romantic love relationships. This activity was used as an introductory activity for a key short story in the unit, "The Chaser," by John Collier, but it

was also designed as a gateway activity because it brought together all that students had done in the unit up to that point. The unit started with an opinionnaire, and had one or two introductory activities for particular works and this one was at a crucial point in the unit. As a follow up to the activity, students developed criteria for a good relationship.

To help you understand how this kind of activity works, we really need to have a feel for what the entire set of six scenarios are all about and what students are being asked to do in the activity that prepares them for reading the story and for writing. (Read directions and have someone in the audience read each of the scenarios.)

First, let me explain the classroom procedures for doing this activity which will help clarify what happens in the activity. I usually have students rank the scenarios on their own. Then, I put them in small mixed groups of four or five and have the groups try to read a consensus on their answers. Then, I lead a class discussion in which I have students compare their small group decisions. You may dispense with the individual rankings prior to small group work if you have a class that works well in small groups; otherwise, I suggest starting with the individual rankings first. This seems to stimulate the small group discussions perhaps because students come to the small groups having done some thinking about the situations presented.

Obviously, trying to reach a consensus in small groups or whole class discussion is no simple matter. There is no one obviously best system of ranking. As with the opinionnaire activities, controversy or disagreement is important. As students try to convince other group members, or small groups try to convince other small groups in the whole class discussion, that they are right, they must elaborate the reasons for their choices. In addition, as they defend their choices they refute the opposing viewpoints of others. They search for evidence, explain and refine their reasoning as they defend their rankings. In arguing why one relationship will last longer than another, students discover the characteristics they feel are necessary for a successful relationship. As part of the whole class discussion, I list what they have come up with on the board.

The point of the small group and whole class discussions is not to come to agreement as to "The" characteristics of a good relationship, but rather to get students to think about what makes a good relationship in preparation for reading the story and to practice the skills involved in writing about literature One important note: The small group discussions are almost absolutely essential to the success of scenario activities. Once we have discussed all of the scenarios, I have students work on their criteria for good relationship, and as a class we come up with four or five criteria that they have derived from their discussion of the scenarios and their previous work in the unit.

With the characteristics of a good relationship in mind, I have students read the story. Then, I put students in small groups and have them determine from evidence in the story how Alan would define love, or, in other words, what Alan's characteristics for a good relationship would be. In the small group and follow-up whole discussions most students are quick to see that Alan's view of love is superficial and inadequate. Many students relate Alan's view to the various relationships depicted in the scenarios. In other words, students apply the characteristics they developed prior to reading to the relationship depicted in the story. In fact, some students even explain their interpretation in terms of where they would rank this relationship in terms of the scenarios they examined. When I ask students to explain why Alan's view of love is inadequate and what Collier is trying to tell us about romantic love relationships, students are usually quick to see that Collier is criticizing more than Alan's romanticized notion that Diana should be jealous of other women. They perceive that Collier is really telling us that love involves considering the needs of people to be free. They recognize that if Alan's ideal were realized, it would result in an unbearable chaining of one individual to another.

Following the discussion of the story, I ask students to refer back to the set of scenarios and rank them as they think Collier would and to compare their responses with their observations about the story. Then I lead a class discussion of their findings. I really enjoy the discussion of how they think Collier would rank the scenarios. There is almost

always considerable disagreement about one or two of the scenarios. Also, many students admit to a change of heart about what makes a good relationship. Some of the guys in particular now admit that scenario #6 (Roscoe and Anne) is not going to last long at all.

An important point about the discussions. The controversy or disagreement that is created means that whenever students speak up they are facing a questioning audience of peers, an audience that is going to challenge unexamined assumptions and unsupported generalizations. The activity (and this is also true of the opinionnaire activities) requires that students find evidence in the story to support their interpretations, and if they can't, then they need to modify or abandon a claim.

By examining these scenarios before they begin reading, students gain interest in a concept that is key to the story and they develop a more sophisticated understanding of love relationships which they use in analyzing the story. I have taught this story without the scenario activity, and I want you to know that getting students to understand what Collier is trying to suggest about love relationships without this introductory activity is extremely difficult. In fact, this activity is based on an earlier version of this activity that was originally developed by a student teacher I had a number of years ago. For his master's paper at the University of Chicago, my student teacher, Steve Kern, did a study in which he used this activity and the story "The Chaser." Kern found that when students participated in introductory activities such as these they achieved higher levels of comprehension than when they do not participate in these activities before reading. Specifically, Kern found that students who participated in introductory scenario activities before reading "The Chaser" achieved significantly greater comprehension scores (and in particular in terms making complex inferences) than students who did not participate in these activities before reading the same stories. Kern's study and a number of additional studies done since Kern's suggest that these kinds of introductory activities help students interpret literature with greater precision.

I want to emphasize that this activity might be used to introduce any work or group of works that involve romantic love relationships and as I have used it here as a gateway activity at a key point in the unit. It is not restricted to this one story.

Assessment and Evaluation

Finally, a good thematic unit contains **assessment and evaluation** of all aspects of the unit. Evaluation is an implicit contract between students and teachers for what students need to learn. We can tell them we value independent thinking and interpretation, but if our tests consist of memorization and recall, they soon figure out that's what we really care about. Therefore, we have to be sure our evaluation reflects and communicates what we care about. In teaching thematic units, key unit questions guide the evaluation. If what we care about is students' ability to use these concepts in order to better grapple with new texts that they will encounter later on their own, then the best evaluation is testing their ability to read and interpret an unfamiliar text.

Assessment and evaluation should involve application of consolidated ideas (key unit questions), and it should involve both students and teacher evaluating the effectiveness of the unit. You might have students complete a survey that asks a series of questions that consider both cognitive and affective dimensions of the unit. The teacher needs to examine the effectiveness of the unit informally (what seemed to work and what didn't?) and formally the extent to which students mastered the unit objectives (Can they apply the unit ideas to an unfamiliar work of literature on their own?)

What Process Should Be Followed When Developing Thematic Units?

While there is no one way to do it, here are suggestions compiled from Hillocks, McCabe, and McCampbell (1971), Smagorinsky and Gevinson (1989), Stern (1995), and McCann (1997).

Select a theme which derives naturally from a discipline or several disciplines.

Research the theme: Why is it important to investigate the theme? How rich is the concept? How appropriate is the theme for a particular group of students? Think about the theme: What problems does it present? Collaborate with colleagues: What do they think of this as a theme? Is it worth studying? In other words, determine if the theme meets the criteria for an effective theme.

Recognize the theme's **many facets** or dimensions.

Develop a rationale: As you research the theme or concept put together the answers to the questions in a good unit rationale. Why is the unit worth teaching? Why is it worthy of study in and of itself for these particular students? Why is the unit appropriate for this particular age group? How will it help further the goals of the curriculum?

Identify the related content, material, and texts: Consider the content of the unit, as well as additional materials and texts, print and nonprint, that you may include. What writing, speech, and other skills and strategies will be included in the unit.

Determine the unit key questions: As you look at the content, material and texts, think about the key unit questions that will guide the unit. Often this will involve thinking about the various dimensions of the theme.

Determine the unit's objectives: As you begin to pull together the content, materials, and texts, plan your objectives. What will students know and be able to do when they finish the unit?

Select and sequence content, materials, and texts: What order will you teach the ideas or concepts, materials and texts? What texts are easiest? Which are most difficult? What is the major work and when will students study it?

Design introductory activity to **introduce the entire unit.**

Design and sequence lessons with activities and assessments.

Design introductory activities for individual works and stages in the unit.

Sequence the series of lessons. This will involve a task analysis starting with the performance objectives (outcomes) you expect to see.

Design a gateway activity that will bring together key aspects of the unit.

Determine how you will assess student learning and how you will evaluate the effectiveness of the unit.

Practicing Aspects of Designing Thematic Units

Selecting an Effective Theme: Assume that your ninth grade curriculum requires that you teach John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. I have convinced you of the value of teaching thematically, and so you decide that you want to build a unit around John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* (See Appendix A for activity assignment).

You read the novel and come up with the following eight themes that you could build a unit around:

Ethical Action

Right and Wrong

Friendship

Murder

Class Mobility

Loyalty and Betrayal

Prejudice (racial and gender)

There are two questions for you to answer: Which of these themes do you think would make the best theme with this particular novel as the centerpiece of the unit? Why?

Which of these themes do you think would be a particularly weak theme with this particular novel? Why?

I'll give you about fifteen minutes to work on the problem and then we'll discuss your answers. Discuss answers. Here is something we haven't talked about: Discuss problems with theme! What problems do you see? Why is that a problem?

Sequencing A series of Activities

Look at the following handout (See Appendix A) involving a possible series of activities for a unit on Friendship in *Of Mice and Men.* (Activity is adapted from Kenney 1999). Determine how you would sequence the activities. Which would come first, second, third, etc.? Why? Think about what would make a good introduction to the unit? Why? What would make a good final assessment of the unit? Why? Look and the elements of a good thematic unit and the process for creating one.

Activities for a Unit on Friendship in *Of Mice and Men*

A. Write an extended definition of "true friendship."

B. Read *Of Mice and Men* and trace friendship through the novel.

C. Watch a TV show (such as *Popular* or *My So-Called Life*) which presents a problematic example of friendship and evaluate whether the relationship is or is not friendship.

D. Read and discuss hypothetical scenarios designed to generate criteria for true friendship.

E. Read short stories and poems which illustrate different aspects of friendship.

F. Read a short story independently and evaluate whether it illustrates true friendship.

G. Write an essay applying a definition of true friendship to the novel, *Of Mice and Men.*

How did you order the activities and why? How did you someone else order them? My colleague Liz Kenney says that what follows is the order of the activities as she used them in her unit and she explains why:

Kenney's order:

D. Scenarios (function as both introductory and gateway activity for the unit)

C. Watch a TV show. Students use the criteria generated for a good friendship from the scenario activity to analyze the friendship relationship on the television show.

E. Read short stories and poems which illustrate difference aspects of unit. The poems and short stories are more difficult to analyze than the television show, so they come after that lesson.

A. Write an extended definition of "true friendship." Students have examined a number of different friendship relationships in literature and are now prepared to determine what they regard as a true friendship based on the literature they have read so far.

B. Read *Of Mice and Men*. Students are now ready to tackle a major work.

G. Write an essay applying a definition of true friendship to the novel, *Of Mice and Men*. Students are now ready to analyze the novel in light of their previous work on friendship.

F. Read a short story independently and evaluate whether it illustrates true friendship. This is the final test or evaluation of how well students understand the theme. Can they do it on their own?

Model Unit: Coming of Age in Vietnam War Combat Literature

Before I ask you to do a couple of more activities, I wanted to briefly take you through an entire unit. The unit I am passing out deals with the Vietnam War and focuses

on the theme of coming of age (See Appendix B). I have not included the unit rationale, but for a complete rationale for this unit see my *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War* (1992). In addition, I have not included all of the lessons, nor have I included all of the activities in the unit. Finally, I have not included any of the literature that is included in the unit. However, I have included the key unit questions--in a slightly different form than I have been talking about--the unit objectives, the wide range of materials are listed in the lessons, and the introductory activity for the unit--an opinionnaire. In addition, you can clearly see how I have sequenced the materials and activities in the unit through the lessons, and see how lessons build on previous lessons. I have also included a second key introductory activity a simulation activity is designed to introduce students to some key aspects of the coming of age theme in Vietnam War literature, and I have included "The Platoon Commander's Dilemma," the gateway activity for the unit. Finally, the last lesson, lesson ten, illustrates how I assess students knowledge and understanding of the unit theme.

Teaching Major Works Thematically Activity

You now have a list of criteria for good thematic units, have had some practice with aspects of what you need to do and how you need to think about teaching thematically, and you have seen a complete unit that is set up thematically. What I would like you to do now is give some thought to **one** major work that you might be able to teach thematically. I would like you to meet in small groups of colleagues who teach common courses and works. I'd like you to spend the next few minutes coming up with at least two major works, and a minimum of two good themes you might focus on for each work, why they are or might be good themes for each work and for your students. Be prepared to present what you come up with to the whole group.

What works did you pick? What themes did you decide to focus on? Why? What makes these themes good? What problems do you see with these themes?

Sequencing Literature in a Unit on Prejudice and Intolerance

I have one last activity I would like you to do today that I think will help you understand how to plan thematic units. There are two short stories that I am passing around for you to read (stories are not provided with this paper), and I am passing out an assignment problem that you need to read (See Appendix A). (Pass out the two stories and give students the following problem):

Imagine that you are going to teach a thematic unit on prejudice and intolerance for ninth grade students. Here are two stories you would like to use in the unit: Toni Cade Bambara's "Raymond's Run" and Richard Brautigan's "The Old Bus." First, read the stories. Then, decide how you will use the stories and why. In other words, where will each appear in the unit and why? Think about how you might sequence literature in such a unit. (For example, by types of prejudice: age, gender, appearance, race/ethnicity, intelligence, physical challenge, religion, political affiliation, or degrees of manifestation: name-calling, separation, physical attack, extermination.) How will you use these stories to advance the theme? Think of at least one activity you will use in a lesson with each story. What language, speech, and/or writing activity might you use with each story?

(After 45 minutes or so) I'd like you to report what you came up with, and then we'll ask some questions about your decisions. For example, why did you decide to sequence them in that order? How will this activity introduce the theme in the story? Do you see any problems with this activity?

Issues and Questions in Designing Thematic Units

There are some key issues and questions that come up when designing and sequencing thematic units. Here is how I would address some of those that often come up:

Some Things to Consider When Designing and Sequencing Thematic Units:

- Not everything you do every day all period has be (or necessarily should be) related to the unit's theme. Students may get tired of the theme if that is all that is stressed during discussions and other activities. Think about pacing. What did students do yesterday? What are you planning to do tomorrow?
- Try to gauge the length of the unit based on the students' interest level. As always in teaching, pacing is very important.
- Try to include a variety of multi-cultural works.
- Try to include a variety of materials, such as stories, poetry, essays, speeches, newspaper articles, young adult literature, songs, films, and television and radio programs, the internet.
- Integrate language and writing activities throughout the unit.
- vary writing assignments, including personal and analytical type of assignments.
- Include speaking activities through individual and small group presentations.
- Develop activities that address different learning styles.
- Student choice in activities and assignments must be planned into the unit, especially for students to respond to works personally and to select their own books to read. This is a key way to address different ability and skill levels of students.
- Leave room and flexibility for students to embellish on the unit's concepts. Even though the teacher has done reading, research, and reflection on the concept, students will almost always develop a richer conception than the teacher had originally envisioned. As a result, if the unit is taught more than once a year, the units just keeps getting better. And when students are allowed to bring in some of the materials for the unit, the teacher will be able to use some of the student-initiated materials for future classes. The students learn to bring in their own world to the classroom's construction

of the unit's major theme. Even more important, the students take what they have learned in the classroom and apply it to their worlds. (See Stern 1995).

Conclusion

What I have tried to show you here today is that teaching thematically isn't what you might have thought it was; and I have tried to show you some ways that it differs from other approaches. I hope that I have shown you how you can design exciting and worthwhile thematic units that will engage and challenge your students. I believe that thematic teaching can revitalize our classrooms and make them exciting learning communities, places where kids want to be. More important, I believe that the approach I have described here today as Bob Probst (1994) says, "respects the text and the reader" and makes our classrooms places that make our students, as Probst points out, "readers and writers, independent and self-reliant thinkers who employ language and literature to enrich their lives" (1994, 44).

I thank you for your attention and for allowing me to come to Niles North today to talk about this important topic.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE UNIT ACTIVITES

Romantic Love Opinionnaire*

Directions: For each of the following statements, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree. Circle one response for each item.

1. Money can't buy you love.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Love makes the world go around.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. Love is blind.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. "Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. Teenagers cannot experience "true love."

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. No one is ever too young to fall in love.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all..

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. Love never changes.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. Physical attraction must precede true love.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. If you're really in love, physical attraction doesn't matter.

    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. You have to work at love.

    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. For the most part, being in love is a "pain in the neck."

    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. If you truly love someone, you will not be attracted to anyone else.

    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. Love at first sight is impossible.

    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

*Adapted from Kahn, Walter, and Johannessen (1984)

What Makes a Good Romantic Love Relationship?

Directions: Based on your knowledge and understanding of what the basic elements are of a good relationship, rank the following relationships in terms of how long you think they will last. In other words, which relationship will last the longest amount of time through which one will end the quickest (#1=longest; #2=second longest; #6=shortest)? Be prepared to explain your rankings.

_____ 1. Tom and Kim are both freshman in high school. They have been friends for years, but only this fall did they discover they liked each other more than just as friends. Both are rather shy about things, and Kim takes a lot of good natured kidding from her close circle of female companions. Recently, Tom has been feeling a little jealous of a particular football player who has been flirting with Kim, but Kim hasn't really been paying the football player much attention.

_____ 2. Scott and Julie have been married for two years. Scott is a very successful young lawyer with a lot on his mind and bright prospects for the future. Julie married him right after she graduated from college. She wanted then only to be a housewife and make him happy in his home life, but she's begun to feel that she doesn't mean a whole lot to Scott. Julie's tried to discuss the matter seriously with Scott, but he just brushes her off with a "You're wrong dear--you're very important to me, and I love you very much." He suggests that if she's feeling trapped at home she she should get a job or "maybe do some kind of volunteer work--you know what I mean, dear."

_____ 3. When they first met there was some kind of explosion. But it wasn't an explosion that lost its effect after the initial blast was over. Regina and Joe met about half a year ago at a party for entering freshman at their university. Both tell all their friends they've never felt like this before; both want to spend all spare moments with each other; both would readily admit that they would do anything for the other. They spend a lot of their time talking about how strange university life is and being thankful that they have each other to serve as comrades in arms against the turmoil of the first year away from home.

_____ 4. When Armando entered the local high school as an exchange student from Italy, all of the girls went crazy--especially Tanya. For months the girls in his English class kept flirting with him, hoping that he'd show some of that famous Italian romantic style and ask them out. Tanya tried everything she knew, all the tricks in the book. Finally he asked her out to a movie, and now she's the envy of every girl in the school. They get along fairly well and have been seeing each other almost every Saturday night for three or four months. Lately Tanya has spent a lot of energy fending off females that still seem interested in Armando even though it's common knowledge that the two are an item.

_____ 5. Alvin and Sarah were married one month before Alvin started medical school. Very much in love, their parents still went overboard to make sure that the marriage would work. Alvin's father set the two of them up in a nice apartment near campus, and Sarah's mother is always stopping by with homemade bread, cookies, pastries, and so on. Both of them knew that a marriage that includes a first year medical student would be tough, but Sarah is trying her hardest not to mind Alvin's extremely late hours and perpetual exhaustion. Alvin feels guilty about neglecting Sarah, reminds himself that Sarah does love him, and tries not to worry too much about it. She seems fairly happy.

_____ 6. Roscoe is a soccer player in college. Anne is an artist just out of high school. The two have been living together for a number of months now. The physical attraction between Roscoe and Anne is considerable. Though they both come from different backgrounds and have dissimilar interests, their minds meet on a lot of things. When they don't, the two usually have horrendous fights involving a lot of yelling and the occassional thrown tube of paint. The fights almost always die quickly with both apologizing to the other. Anne says that their differences make them stronger as a couple. Roscoe isn't sure about that, but he's willing to go along with it for the time being as long as Anne doesn't forget--as he puts it--"how to act like an animal as soon as the lights go out."

Adapted from Kern, Steve. (1983). The effects of introductory activities upon reading comprehension: An exploratory Pilot Study. Unpublished MAT Thesis. U of Chicago.

Which is the Best and which is the Weakest Theme?

Problem: Assume that your ninth grade curriculum requires that you teach John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. You want to teach thematically, so you decide that you want to build a unit around this novel.

You read the novel and come up with the following eight themes that you could build a unit around:

Ethical Action

Right and Wrong

Friendship

Murder

Class Mobility

Loyalty and Betrayal

Prejudice (racial and gender)

There are two questions for you to answer: Which of these themes do you think would make the best theme with this particular novel as the centerpiece of the unit? Why?

Which of these themes do you think would be a particularly weak theme with this particular novel? Why?

Activities for a Unit on Friendship in *Of Mice and Men*

A. Write an extended definition of "true friendship."

B. Read *Of Mice and Men* and trace friendship through the novel.

C. Watch a T.V. show (such as *Popular* or *My So-Called Life*) which presents a problematic example of friendship and evaluate whether the relationship is or is not friendship.

D. Read and discuss hypothetical scenarios designed to generate criteria for true friendship.

E. Read short stories and poems which illustrate different aspects of friendship.

F. Read a short story independently and evaluate whether it illustrates true friendship.

G. Write an essay applying a definition of true fiendship to the novel, *Of Mice and Men.*

Sequencing Literature in a Unit on Prejudice and Intolerance

Directions: Imagine that you are going to teach a thematic unit on prejudice and intolerance for ninth grade students.

Here are two stories you would like to use in the unit: Toni Cade Bambara's "Raymond's Run" and Richard Brautigan's "The Old Bus."

First, read the stories.

Then, decide how you will use the stories and why. In other words, where (at one point) might each appear in the unit and why? Think about how you might sequence literature in such a unit.

How will you use these stories to advance the theme?

Think of at least one activity you will use in a lesson with each story. What language, speech, and/or writing activity might you use with each story?

Appendix B

Model Thematic Unit

Coming of Age in The Vietnam War:
The Vietnam Experience in the Combat Narrative of the Vietnam War
By Larry R. Johannessen

Key Unit Questions and Problems:
The Vietnam (Coming of Age) Experience in Combat Narratives of the Vietnam War

The Six Stages of the Vietnam Experience: The Thematic Structure of the Combat Narrative

Stage One: The mystique of pre-induction: The Mystique of Pre-induction or the John Wayne Syndrome.
- What are the main character's attitudes toward war? Patriotism? Technology?
- What is his or her attitude toward war and/or the war in Vietnam?
- What are major influences on the main character's attitudes?
- Why does he or she decide to go to war?

Stage Two: The Initiation into the Military Culture in Recruit Training
- What difficulties does the main character have adjusting to life in the military?
- What are significant experiences in recruit training? Why?
- How does the main character change as a result of recruit training?
- How does recruit training attempt to prepare young people for the war in Vietnam? Is it effective? Why or why not?

Stage Three: The Dislocation of Arrival in Vietnam--Culture Shock
- How does the main character travel to Vietnam?
- What are his or her initial experiences upon arrival in country?
- How does he or she react to these experiences?
- How are the Vietnamese portrayed?

Stage Four: The Confrontation with Mortality in the First Firefight
- How does the main character react the first time in combat?
- What impact does this experience have on the main character?
- What are the concerns of the main character and others around him or her?

Stage Five: Experience and Consideration: a) confronting the moral dilemma; b) from innocence to experience and consideration; or c) from innocence to numbness and madness.
- How and why do the concerns of the characters change over time?
- What is the main character's attitude toward the war, the military, America, and the Vietnamese? How and why has his or her attitude changed?
- What experiences have had an impact on the main characters? Why?
- What difficult moral choices does the main character consider? How does s/he respond? Why?

Stage Six: The Phenomenon of Coming Home: How to live with the legacies of the war, with the guilt, the loss of faith, the loss of innocence?
- How does the main character leave Vietnam? What is his or her reaction to leaving?
- What is the main character's return to the United States like?
- How has the main character changed? What is his or her attitude toward the war? Has it changed? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
- How do people at home treat the main character? Why?

Putting It Together: Central Meaning:
- What is the author telling readers about the Vietnam War and/or war?

What is the author saying about courage? Friendship? War as a ritual? What is the author saying about coming of age in the Vietnam War? What is the Vietnam Experience?

Unit Sequence

Lesson #1: Introductory Activity: Vietnam War Opinionnaire

Objectives: Engage students' in the unit topic
Raise key questions and problems
Introduce some of the elements of the Vietnam Experience

Materials: "Thinking about the Vietnam War" Twenty Statements Opinionnaire

Description: Students are asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements (generalizations) which have been designed to elicit problematic aspects of the war in Vietnam, especially those related to the experiences of soldiers who fought in the war. Students first respond to the statements on their own, and then the teacher guides the class in a whole class discussion of the areas of disagreement. A final step would be for students to decide what they think the most important elements of a soldier's experience are.

Follow up: Students might write a paragraph defending their choices for the key elements of a soldier's experiences.

Lesson #2: The Vietnam Experience in poetry and short stories

Objectives: Develop an understanding of some elements of the Vietnam Experience through analyzing poetry and short stories
*Read Several poems and short stories
*Through oral and written responses, debate and then determine and define some of the key aspects of the Vietnam Experience.

Materials: A packet of Vietnam War combat poems: "Fragment: 5 September 1967" by W. D . Ehrhart, "APO 96225" by Larry Rottman, "Hunting" by W. D. Ehrhart, "Sometime After Breakfast" by Steven P. Smith, "The Man in Black" by Frank A. Cross, Jr., "The Insert" by R. L. Barth, "Vietnam Era Vet" by Vince Gotera. One poem, "Coming Home" by W. D. Ehrhart, is not part of the packet.
Short stores: "The Centurion" by Tim O'Brien, "We Have Met The Enemy" by Robin Moore, "Young Man in Vietnam" by Charles Coe

Description I: After students have discussed the statements on the opinionnaire, have them read "We Have Met The Enemy" and "Centurion." They are divided into small groups and given a set of discussion questions on the two stores. The questions ask students to imagine how the characters in each story would reacted had they been in the situation that the other characters from the other story were in. This forces students to consider some of the difficult circumstances soldiers had to deal with in the Vietnam War. Students are asked to return to the opinionnaire and respond to the statements as they think the main characters in the stories would respond.

Follow-up I: Students are asked to write a composition arguing how one of the authors would respond to two or three of the statements on the opinionnaire based on evidence from the story. Another possible assignment is to give students another story to read, "Young Man in Vietnam," and write an analysis of what the author is saying about the Vietnam War.

Description II: The poems have been carefully selected to represent various aspects of the Vietnam Experience. The teacher reads the first poem in the packet aloud, "Fragment: 5 September 1967." The teacher leads a class discussion focusing on the experience described in the poem. The poem highlights the youth of the soldiers, and highlights their loss of innocence when they confront death in what is perhaps their first firefight. Students then examine the remaining poems in small groups. In their groups, students examine the poems using some of the key unit questions. When the groups finish, the teacher leads a discussion of the poems, and the class generates a list of some of the elements of the Vietnam Experience.

Follow up II: Students are given another poem, and asked to read it and determine the key element of the Vietnam Experience. While the other poems focus on the horrors of combat, this one focuses on the phenomenon of coming home from the war. Students are applying the analytical skills they learned in a new situation and on their own.

Lesson #3: Understanding the War through the Arts

Objectives: Engage students in experiencing the power of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. to introduce learning about the war and literature through the arts
Research the arts of the war
Do an oral report on the arts of the war and relate it to the literature

Materials: Slides of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. and letters left at the memorial. "The Arts and the Vietnam War" Assignment sheet.

Description: Students view a series of slides of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the teacher reads selections from letters left at the war. The teacher leads a discussion challenging students to react to what they are seeing and hearing. Students come to see the impact that the art that has emerged in response to the war has on them. With their interest ignited, the teacher passes out the the assignment, and working in pairs or small groups students select one of the topics, research how one of the arts has been influenced by the war, and they prepare and give an oral presentation to the class. Students give their reports as the class moves through the unit, and one of their requirements is to relate what they have learned to the literature that the class has studied.

Lesson #4: Mines and Booby Traps Simulation

Objectives: Engage students in experiencing key aspects of the Vietnam Experience
Introduce concept of the cumulative effect of the war
Raise key unit questions

Materials: Coffee cans, fishing line, and other materials, including an appropriate room for creating a simulated Vietnam combat zone.

Description: Students experience what it was like to be a soldier in Vietnam as they try to find their way through a darkened room that is filled with mines and booby traps. Students experience some of the danger and fear that soldiers faced every day in Vietnam, and the cumulative effect of constantly taking casualties. Students also come to understand the degree to which soldiers in small units depended on one another for survival. These issues are themes constantly running through many works dealing with the war. In addition, as students discuss their experience and the teacher raises key unit questions they develop a deep understanding of some aspects of the Vietnam Experience that they will be asked to apply when they read the literature. After setting up the room, students are assigned to squads, and each squad has an opportunity to try to get to the other end of the room. If they hit a mine or booby-trap the entire squad is dead. After all the groups have tried to get through the room, the teacher leads a discussion of what the squads experienced, focusing on how they felt and what it must have been like for soldiers in Vietnam.

Follow-up: Instead of an immediate class discussion once the simulation is finished, students might write a composition based on a set of questions about their feelings and reactions to the simulation and key unit questions about what it was like to be a soldier in Vietnam. Then have students share their responses. After doing this activity, students are prepared for dealing with some of the issues and characters they will encounter in the literature because they will be abie to relate them to their own experiences and perceptions which they explored through this activity.

Lesson #5: The experience of Vietnam

Objectives: Develop an understanding of the Vietnam Experience through literature
*Read a short story
*Through oral and written responses, apply the concepts learned in the simulation regarding danger, fear, and the cumulative effects the war.

Materials: Short stories: "Night March" by Tim O'Brien, "Extract" by Wayne Karlin, "Medical Evacuation" by Wayne Karlin

Description: Students read a short story like "Night March" by Tim O'Brien that focuses on the concepts introduced in the simulation. After reading the story, students work in small groups answering a set of questions that asks them to apply key unit questions to the story they have read.

Follow-up: Students might be asked to read another short story such as "Extract" or Medical Evacuation" by Wayne Karlin that focuses on the same concepts. Students write an analysis of the short story, applying on their own the concepts they have learned in the simulation.

Lesson #6: The Vietnam Experience in a non-fiction narratives or oral history of the war

Objectives: Develop and extend students understanding of the Vietnam Experience through analysis of a non-fiction narrative or an oral history of the war
*Read the text
*Through oral and written responses, apply what has been learned about the Vietnam Experience

*Extend understanding of key elements of the Vietnam Experience
Raise key unit questions

Materials: *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* by Mark Baker, *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*, Dir. by Bill Couturie

Description I: As a class, students read the "Introduction" and first section, "Initiation" of Mark Baker's *Nam*. Then, the teacher leads a class discussion utilizing a set of guide questions that are based on the key unit questions and the reading focuses on the first two stages of the Vietnam Experiences. The teacher then assigns students to read the rest of the oral history and assigns students to small groups to report to the class on a particular section of the book. The groups have a set of generic questions that focus on the themes and relate to a particular stage of the Vietnam Experience. Students give their reports, students formulate conclusions about the war and the nature of the Vietnam Experience.

Follow-up I: Students are asked to write a composition describing one or two aspects of the Vietnam Experience as revealed in the book. They should highlight the key features of the experience. Students might also interview a Vietnam Veteran about his or her experiences in the war an compare them to the stories in the book.

Description II: Students view the award-winning documentary film, *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*. The film not only gives a history of the war, but it provides a complete picture of all six stages of the Vietnam Experience on film. After viewing the film, the teacher leads a class discussion of the film, focusing on the key unit questions and the stages of the Vietnam Experience. Also, the teacher should discuss the ending which examines some legacies of the war, ten years after the ending of the war.

Follow-up II: Students select one of three response topics and write a composition that allows them to explore an aspect of the film in more depth utilizing evidence from the film to support their views.

Lesson #7: "One Picture Says 40,000 Words" (Adapted from an activity developed by Tom McCann [1999], "Inquiry-Based Interdisciplinary Lessons")

Objectives: Engage students in a problem applying their knowledge of the Vietnam Experience
Raise key unit questions

Materials: "One Picture Says 40,000 Words" Problem Handout with four images and critical descriptions of the novel, four overhead transparencies of the possible images for the novel.

Description: Students attempt to apply their knowledge of the Vietnam Experience and Vietnam War Literature in a problem that asks them to select an image that best represents the essence of novel and will appeal to young readers. The teacher hands out the problem and students read along as the teacher reads the problem. Students are to study the images, capsule descriptions of the novel, and then they pick the image they think is best and why. Students work in groups to discuss and pick the image and the basis for their

selection. The groups share their decision and rationale, and the groups discuss and debate their selections.

Follow-up: Students write a composition explaining which image they picked and why and explain why the other images are not as good or appropriate as the one they selected.

Lesson #8: Case Study: Platoon Commander's Dilemma

Objectives: Engage students' interests
Extend students' understanding of the moral dilemma (stage 5)
Raise key questions

Materials: "Platoon Commander's Dilemma" case study

Description: Although students have some understanding of the difficulties that soldiers faced in Vietnam, this high interest activity is designed to engage them in understanding that perhaps the key aspect of the Vietnam Experience occurs in Stage 5 when the soldier (main character) of the work confronts a moral choice. It is the centerpiece of the coming of age theme, and an important dimension of Vietnam War literature, and indeed, twentieth century war literature. This activity prepares students for the novel they sill read and the moral choice that the main character will face. Students read the case study silently as the teacher read it aloud. Then, students write a composition that answers the questions posed in the case. Then, the teacher has students share their responses with the class and leads a discussion focusing on the moral dilemma the character faces, the choices students made and why.

Lesson #9: The Vietnam Experience in a major work

Objectives: Trace stages of the Vietnam Experience as students read a major combat narrative
Apply key unit questions as they read, including new issues such as confronting a moral choice and how and why the character changes as a result of his experience
Write an essay on the stages of the Vietnam Experience in the novel with emphasis on the moral choice the main character makes and the impact of the choice on the character's growth
*Use textual evidence to support claims about the novel

Materials: Students read one of the major combat narratives such as: Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*, Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*, *Going After Cacciato*, or *The Things They Carried*, Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July*, or Walter Dean Myers' *Fallen Angels*. Students view on of the major Vietnam War films such as *Platoon*, *Full-Metal Jacket*, *Apocalypse Now*, or *Hamburger Hill*.

Description: As the class reads and discusses the novel, students apply what they have learned in this new situation. The key problem is that students now trace each of the stages of the Vietnam Experience and must consider the impact of the moral choice on the major character. The teacher may have students consider how the main character would have reacted had he been in the same situation as the main character in the "Platoon Commander's

Dilemma" case. Then, students view one of the major Vietnam War films and apply key unit questions and trace the stages of the Vietnam Experience.

Lesson #10: Assessment

Objectives: Students apply their knowledge of the stages of the Vietnam Experience to an unfamiliar work read independently.

Materials: "Ben" by George Davis or "Welcome Home" by Robin Moore

Description: Any true assessment of an inquiry-based thematic unit must require students to demonstrate the ability to read a text, draw appropriate inferences, and apply the key unit concepts independently. Either of these stories work well as a test because it is short enough that students can read it and write a short essay in a single class period, and because it illustrates key aspects of the Vietnam Experience.

THINKING ABOUT THE VIETNAM WAR

Directions: Below is a series of statements. Circle the response which most closely indicates how you feel about the statement. Be prepared to explain your answers.

1. "Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant taste of death but once."

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. John Rambo is a good image for Americans to have of the Vietnam veteran: he represents all that America stands for and the American soldier in war.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. "The only heroes in war are the dead ones."

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. "My country right or wrong" is not just a slogan--it is every citizen's patriotic duty.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. No cause, political or otherwise, is worth dying for.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. Most American soldiers participated in acts of brutality against Vietnamese civilians.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. It is never right to kill another person.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. The soldiers who served in the Vietnam War did so because they were very patriotic.

   Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. The *Rambo* movies are very bad because they show a distorted view of what war is really like and of what it is like to be a soldier.

    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. "The soldier, above all other people, prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war."

    Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

12.The Vietnam War was a guerrilla war; therefore, it is understandable that many Vietnamese civilians suffered as a result of American military actions.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

13.People should never compromise their ideals or beliefs.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

14.For combat soldiers, the difference between death or survival often meant not doing the right or moral thing or worrying about possible harm to innocent civilians.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

15."The men who do well on the average, perhaps with one moment of glory, those men are brave."

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

16.When veterans came home from Vietnam, most Americans treated them as heroes.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

17.Those who avoid the draft or desert and go to some other country should never be given amnesty or allowed to return to the United States.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

18.Many Vietnam veterans believe as one veteran put it: "You can't do what we did [in Vietnam] and then be happy about it. And nobody lets you forget it."

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

19."We've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all."

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

20.True courage means standing up for your beliefs.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Adapted from Johannessen, Larry R. (1992). *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War.* Urbana: NCTE, pp. 145-146.

Mines and Booby Traps Simulation/Role-Playing Activity

Procedures: This activity is designed to help students deal with a number of concepts that are key to understanding a variety of works dealing with the Vietnam War, particularly the combat narrative. It is based on the idea that mines and booby traps were a constant danger for soldiers in the war. This danger, the fear that it produced on the part of soldiers, and the cumulative effects of constantly taking casualties in this manner is a common thread running through many works dealing with the Vietnam War. Another related concept that students need to understand is the degree to which soldiers in small units, fire teams, squads, platoons, and companies, depended on one another for survival. In works such as *The Things They Carried, Going After Cacciato, If I Die in a Combat Zone, A Rumor of War, Fields of Fire, Buffalo Afternoon, Fallen Angels, The 13th Valley,* and *Platoon,* we see the interplay of these themes. For example, in *Fields of Fire,* Lieutenant Hodges's constant frustration with taking casualties from mines, booby traps, and snipers contributes to his change in attitude toward the war. He came to the war as a young, gung-ho officer, but after a few months in the field, he concludes that the only true measure of success is how many of his men he brings back alive after each patrol.

This simulation requires some preparation and planning. The teacher needs to have a way to darken the classroom or some other room to set up the minefield and booby traps. Darken the windows and set up coffee cans with black thread connecting them (using masking tape to attach the thread) across various parts of the room. I arrange the chairs or student desks in a labyrinth of trails so that from above the room looks something like a maze. I then set the connected coffee cans at various levels and positions across the trails, some spread across the trails at ankle level, others at chest level, and still others at various angles. I leave one trail free of mines and booby traps, while another contains one or two, and two others have them every four or five feet. I also like to place a few interesting-looking articles (connected to coffee cans with black thread) on or near trails that students might see and try to pick up in the same way that many soldiers picked up interesting-looking items only to discover that they were booby-trapped. Virtually any unusual or curious items that will likely attract students' attention will work, such as old canteens or other military gear, articles of clothing, jewelry, a billfold, a purse, or just plain junk from the basement or garage. Think about hot items that students just can't resist picking up. You will likely need a number of coffee cans and other items in order to set up enough mines and booby traps to make the problem challenging. The result of all this is that when students try to cross the room, most of them encounter a maze of mines and booby traps which, when knocked over, crash with a loud noise on the hard (linoleum) floor.

The next step is to divide the class into "squads" of four or five students whose task is to make it from one end of the room to the other without tripping a mine or booby trap. After assigning the squads, I have each squad pick a squad leader, point man[person] (to lead the patrol, radioman[person] (who must carry a pack weighing about twenty pounds), and M-60 machine gunner (who must carry a rather heavy and awkward four-foot board). I then bring students into the room in squads and tell them that they must make it from one end of the room to the other without tripping any mines or booby traps. If they do hit a mine or booby trap, they have killed not only themselves but their entire squad.

Usually, about half the squads make it through. Sometimes a thoughtful student will ask if it is okay if they crawl, and then actually do crawl across the room. Usually, at least one curious individual blows up his or her squad because he or she wants a closer look at those interesting-looking objects. Two or three squads pick the right trail and nothing happens. Another two or three pick the heavily mined and booby-trapped trail and

do not make it. Other squads get nearly to the end, stop being so careful, and hit an angled mine stretched across a portion of the trail. In this activty students get a glimpse of the real terror of combat. It helps to prepare them for the reality of Vietnam that they will encounter in the literature.

Once all of the students have gone through the simulation, the next step is to lead a class discussion of what they experienced. I use the following questions as a guide:

1. How did you decide who would play which role (squad leader, point man, radioman, M-60 machine gunner)? Were your decisions right? Why or why not? Were they important? Why or why not?
2. How did you go about picking the route you decided to take? Was it a wise decision? Why or why not? Was it a lucky decision? Why or why not?
3. How do you account for or explain hitting (or not hitting) a mine or booby trap? How might you have avoided it? Was it just luck? Why nor why not?
4. Was teamwork important in your squad? Why or why not?
5. What do you think makes a good leader in this situation? A good point man? A good radioman? A good machine gunner?
6. How did you feel as you went through the simulation? How did you feel when you set off a mine or booby trap? When one of your squad members set off a mine or booby trap? How do you think it felt for soldiers who had to walk through areas like this every day for a year or longer? What might the cumulative effect might be on soldiers?
7. What have you learned about the conditions of the war in Vietnam from this activity?

As students discuss these questions, they begin to realizewhat it was like for soldiers in Vietnam. They talk about being cautious, a little nervous or scared that they or someone in their squad would set off a mine or booby trap, and the importance of communication within the squad. Have students compile a list of the various feelings and reactions to the situation for later comparison to what they find when they read the literature. An alternative (or follow-up) to the class discussion is to have students write a composition that answers the above questions, and then have them share and discuss their responses. As one student wrote: "The minefield... really made you put yourself in those men's minds. I'm sure they must have been terrified all the time. And you really have to rely on all the other people to do their job, or your own life could be at stake...." As this response suggests, after doing this activity, students are prepared for dealing with some of the issues and characters they will encounter in the literature because they will be able to relate them to their own experiences and perceptions which they explored through this activity.

Adapted from Johannessen, Larry R. (March/April 2000). "Using a Simulatin and Literature to Teach the Vietnam War." *The Social Studies* 91.2: 79-83.

The Platoon Commander's Dilemma

During the Vietnam War, Second Lieutenant John Pickett was an infantry platoon commander in a company that was operating in the Hiep Duc Valley area, Quang Tin Province in the I Corp Tactical Zone. The company had recently moved into this area that had been an enemy stronghold for many years. As a soldier he was taught that he must obey all orders of his superior officers. To disobey is a crime.

While his company was searching the village of Nui Chom, one of Pickett's men set off a booby trap that killed two men and badly wounded a third. A hasty investigation by the company commander, Captain Jose Juarez, uncovered evidence that the village was inhabited by only women and children and also pointed to a woman and her eleven-year old child as the possible culprits. Juarez ordered Pickett to shoot the woman and her son to make an example of them.

Pickett was appalled at the idea of killing women and children, especially when there was a chance they might be innocent. He voiced his opinion, but his company commander, his superior officer, said that as a good soldier he must follow orders. He told Pickett that he owed more loyalty to his fellow soldiers than to a bunch of murdering enemy villagers. Pickett looked down at the torn bodies of his dead and wounded troopers and thought about how they had carried out his orders without question for the past few months. Maybe he did owe them something more.

Pickett walked over to the woman and her son who were tied up and squatting on the ground. He took out his pistol and put it to the woman's head. She and her young son began crying and whimpering something in Vietnamese that he could not understand.

Captain Juarez joined Pickett and reminded him that with no men around, these villagers were probably the wives and children of enemy soldiers. As Pickett thought about what to do, his platoon medic told him that Smitty had just died from the wounds he received from the booby trap.

Pickett could feel the anger rise in the pit of his stomach. Now there were three men dead because of what this woman and her son may have done. Suddenly he wanted very badly to carry out the Captain's orders. As he took the safety off of the pistol, he could hear the village women and children crying and whimpering. He tightened his finger on the trigger, but then he hesitated.

Questions

What should Pickett do: refuse to kill the woman and her son or shoot them? Why is that the right thing for him to do? Do you agree with what Captain Juarez told Pickett? Why or why not?